What We Haven't Learned

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ARLY SUMMER 1950 marked an unnecessary nadir for the professionals of the US Army. Following World War II, the United States once again disarmed to a degree far below the level of force that it expected to be able to project. The Army maintained 10 understrength divisions, four in Japan, one in Germany and the remaining five in the Continental United States (CONUS). Despite the fact that this phenomenon had already occurred twice in the past 50 years, Army doctrine did not acknowledge the realities of congressionally imposed force structure.

Doctrine is the core of a military institution, yet doctrine is only half the solution. The US Army has demonstrated an incredible capacity to create doctrine that it cannot execute. We develop complex doctrine that requires trained and cohesive units, but we have repeatedly failed our soldiers by committing them to combat without one component or the other. We are all comfortable with our various definitions of "trained." Numerous Army regulations and divisional training publications established standards that individuals and units must meet to earn the rating "trained." The same cannot be said for the term, or even the concept, of cohesion.

The capstone doctrinal manual of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, and the primary leadership manual, FM 22-100, *Army Leadership*, do not even define the term *cohesion* or use it in the context of their historical examples. Should this concern professional leaders?

On 25 June 1950, eight divisions of the North Korean army rolled across the border at the 38th parallel, invading our allies and prompting the United States to intervene to contain communism. Among the US units that went ashore in the first

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For the past century, doctrine has been written with the presupposition that the implementing units are fully trained, manned and equipped. Personnel policies, however, operated contrary to the doctrine. . . . The fault often lies at many echelons, and because of this the blame may be diffused. It is the Army overall, however, that is at fault for allowing personnel policies that destroy cohesion and committing ad hoc units to combat.

weeks of combat was the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry of the 1st Cavalry Division. Its soldiers were unprepared for combat.³ In this they were not alone. The dissolution of 2/7 Cavalry on their second night in combat was a phenomenon repeated by numerous American units in the early days of the Korean War. Starting with the now-famous Task Force *Smith* and ending, largely, with the "stand or die" order in the Pusan Perimeter along the Naktong, American units broke and ran more often than we are comfortable remembering today. What lessons have we learned from this?

The Army has, for the past century, written doctrine with the presupposition that the implementing units are fully trained, manned and equipped. Personnel policies, however, operated contrary to the doctrine.⁴ Committing tactical units to combat at anything but full strength with a trained and cohesive leadership team at the helm is irresponsible and dangerous. As any professional would readily agree, there is no excuse for committing men unfamiliar with one another to combat. Cohesion is a relatively new term used to describe an ancient concept.⁵ It is the cement that holds units together. Sending men into combat without this factor is negligence. The fault, however, often lies at many echelons, and



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This article addresses the interrelationship of doctrine and Armywide personnel policies in the periods before combat in both Korea and Vietnam. The central thesis here is that the Army has twice failed to match its doctrinal assumptions with the realities of the military force that exists in peacetime. In this developing age of limited, come-as-you-are wars, we can no longer afford to ignore the effects that Armywide manpower policies have on our units. Few dispute the claim that the luxury of the buildup and training period the United States and its allies had prior to *Desert Storm* was an anomaly. Political and social pressures place greater and greater pressures upon the military to execute perfect tactical operations. We will not accomplish them in the next war if we maintain the current trajectory. In the future we must have tactical units trained and prepared at the outset, not after they relearn the lessons their grandfathers wrote in blood.

Lessons Written in Blood

One of the great dangers in using military history to derive specific "lessons learned" is the potential for abuse. Samuel Clemens once said of statistics that there are "lies, damned lies, and statistics." Much the same could be said of "military utilitarian" military history.⁶ With sufficient research, nearly any proposition or position may be defended or advanced with an appropriate example from history. Good history tells the story and allows the facts to speak for themselves.

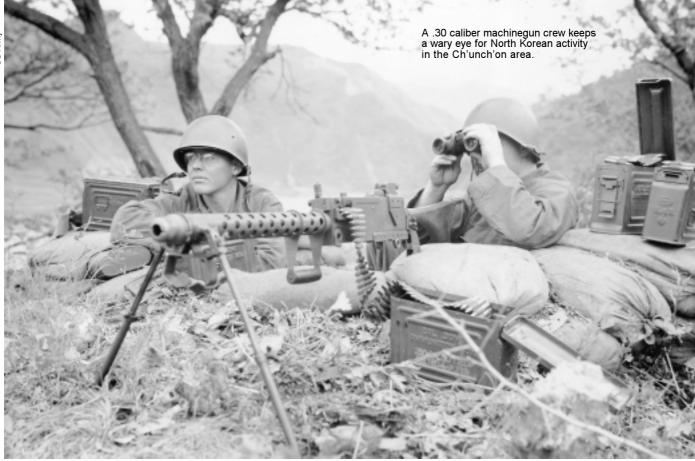
These, then, are the facts.

On 24 July 1950, the day that it arrived on the front lines in Korea, the 7th Cavalry Regiment was more than 30-percent understrength from its doctrinal Table of Organization. As in most regiments, there were only two of the three authorized battalions actually on hand. On the night of 25 July 1950, the regiment was ordered to begin a series of retrograde movements. The 2d Battalion was in contact at the time and on the morning of 26 July 1950 reported one dead, six wounded and more than 199 missing. 8

The narrative recorded by a participant in a postwar history of the regiment is characteristically vague about the events surrounding the first combat by the battalion.

"During the withdrawal that followed, the 2d Battalion was under continuous attack. The unit became scattered, and out of communications with each other; many platoons did not receive the order to withdraw, and general chaos and confusion resulted as enemy tanks and 'refugees' began firing wildly from the road leading to the rear."

The next morning Captain Melvin Chandler, the commander of H Company, assembled a provisional



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force from the stragglers and established a defense farther to the south. His efforts collected approximately 300 soldiers moving to the rear. He then led a patrol north to recover what materiel they could between the current US lines and the lines of the North Koreans.¹⁰

More facts: On the night of 26 July 1950, the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry lost the following equipment: One switchboard, one emergency lighting unit, 14 machineguns, 9 radios, 120 M-1 rifles, 26 carbines, 7 Browning Automatic Rifles, 6 60mm mortars.¹¹

We now have two elements of fact to build a historical account. History is the product of men sitting in clean, safe offices, years after the facts occurred, attempting to fill in the gaps. Reading between the lines of these facts, it is not difficult to discern that this was a rout. The evidence is available in numerous personal accounts not cited here; for our purposes, allowing the facts to speak for themselves is enough.

To begin with, we know that the battalion had not occupied a defensive position for very long before the "bug out." Switchboards and land-line communications were therefore probably not yet in place

below the battalion level. Nor was it likely that light sets were yet established in company positions. That these items were lost suggests that all was not well even at the battalion headquarters. That is bad enough, but at the company and platoon levels, nine radios were lost. Only officers communicated by radio. However, even though the radios were carried by radio-telephone operators (RTO), that nine of them were lost points to rather complete unit disintegration. In effect, if the officers could not (or would not) maintain discipline in their immediate personal vicinity (RTOs in the infantry are never far from their officers), we begin to see a picture in which it was every man for himself in a desperate surge to the rear.

The image of desperation solidifies with the cold fact that 153 individual weapons—rifles, carbines and Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs) were reported lost. These were discarded, almost certainly, by men gripped with panic. It is the crewserved weapons, however, that seal the image. Six 60mm mortars and 14 machineguns were abandoned, not by individuals, but by groups of men. If S.L.A. Marshall, for all his faults, ever got any-

thing straight, it was probably his observation that crew-served weapons tend to stand fast longest and fight hardest. According to Marshall, and many who have validated his initial observations since then, the mutual psychological support of working in a small team tends to allow crew-served weap-

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ons to withstand the battering effects of fear better than most.¹² The lost weapons, the 300 men "collected" by Chandler and the lost communications gear all contribute to a panorama of disintegrating control and small-unit cohesion. Poor communications, the fact that some elements of the battalion were in limited contact with the enemy and the rumors of defeat in other sectors combined to overwhelm the system of discipline and organization.

Any number of causes could be paraded forth, but the facts suggest that on the night of 25 July 1950, the 7th Cavalry lost what little cohesion it had and turned into a mob. This mob then further broke down into individuals who dispersed, escaping as best they could toward friendly lines. What caused the disintegration of 2/7 Cavalry?

The Loss of Cohesion

While the analogy may overreach somewhat, one author recently suggested that fear is communicable in military units much as force is transmitted in the obscure field of granular physics: men react to one another's emotions. Combat is terrifying. Combat with strangers is even more nerve-wracking. Men transmit their messages, building upon one another's fears even in the absence of visible evidence suggesting the cause for fear is valid. Without some force to maintain the unit as a viable combat element, it descends into chaos and suffers defeat.

Military historian and sociologist Bruce Watson explains how military units lose their cohesion in a somewhat more systematic way in his book *When Soldiers Quit, Studies in Military Disintegration.* Watson suggests that disintegration, from military unit to crowd, will occur when the following conditions exist. First, he suggests that there must be a

failure in leadership. Next, the soldiers' primary groups collapse and become alienated from the institutional objectives of the military. Finally, when the primary groups become desperate because they believe that there is no way to improve their condition within the boundaries of the normal organizational system, the situation is ripe for the loss of formal and approved cohesion.¹⁴

Watson is right. What happened to the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, and indeed much of the 1st Cavalry and 24th Infantry Divisions, during those first desperate days in Korea was something very similar. Despite the fact that several historians have begun the process of "rehabilitating" the reputation of Task Force *Smith*, the lead element of the 24th Infantry Division, the fact remains that TF *Smith*, like the other battalions of the first divisions committed, dissolved after it was ordered to withdraw.¹⁵

Our doctrine was not structured to support the reality of the conditions faced by our forces. The most recent edition of the Army's capstone doctrine, Field Service Regulation 1949, was generally just an update of the 1941 edition. It stressed infantry operations at the core of Army operations and the importance of combined arms in all situations, but it did not address the importance of unit cohesion or solidarity. Doctrine did not match the reality of understrength, undertrained units.

How do we ensure that our troops do not fold when placed in situations such as that faced in the summer of 1950? Since it appears that we may again travel a similar trail, and we have not matched our doctrine to our diminishing resources, have we really demonstrated the capacity to learn, to develop wisdom from our collective mistakes?

In 1963 T.R. Fehrenbach published his classic work on the Korean War, This Kind of War. The first several chapters read as a study in military unpreparedness. Fehrenbach was a retired Army officer writing history with a purpose. He did not want to see untrained and understrength American units committed to combat again. In the summer of 1965, less than two years after the publication of *This Kind* of War, the United States sent large formations of soldiers in harm's way again. The lead element for the Army was, once again, the 1st Cavalry Division. One battalion in that division was decimated in its first major engagement just a few months later. Once again, 2-7 Cavalry would suffer the effects of the split between Army doctrine and Army policy, this time in the tall grass of a place known as LZ Albany.¹⁷

Things were generally better for the 1st Cavalry that summer. They had recently completed extensive testing of the new air assault concept and most



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battalions were highly trained as a result of this process. Unfortunately, one battalion was not. During the course of the training and evaluation process, the unit that would be reflagged as the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry had been the opposing force (OPFOR) for the division during the experiment phase and manned at less than 50 percent in soldiers and leaders. 18 Besides the OPFOR role, it also filled many of the division guard and detail requirements. This battalion was not ready for combat. In order to collect the requisite leadership, the battalion commander and command sergeant major ran a dragnet across Fort Benning, Georgia, for the 30 days available between notification and deployment. The battalion deployed with approximately 70-75 percent of its authorized personnel and conducted only one "familiarization ride" in a helicopter. More than 50 percent of the leaders had joined the unit in the preceding 30 days.¹⁹ Added to this chaos were restrictions on which soldiers were even eligible for deployment based upon various factors of time in service and the ends of their enlistment contracts. There was no "stop-loss" for the 7th Cavalry that

year—nor for entire the Army throughout the war.

In November 1965 this same battalion participated in Operation Silver Bayonet in the Republic of South Vietnam. Deployed just three months earlier, this was its first major combat operation—just days after the battalion had changed command. Now an untried unit, with most of the leadership barely familiar with the soldiers (who were often new to the battalion themselves), had new leadership at the top as well. The bureaucratic Army system dictated when individuals should command according to the needs of the individual, and leaders were replaced and switched according to personnel regulations. We may take this as a given today: command rotations regardless of the situation and high personnel turbulence in peacetime are now standard American practices. But these practices are wrong and contradict our doctrinal objectives.

Although led by one Korean War veteran in a division commanded by another, the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry was in some areas just as unprepared as it had been 15 years earlier and for some of the same reasons.²⁰ Numerous factors caused what later

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happened at LZ Albany; this article only serves to compare this one battalion's experiences in the first battles of two different wars.

Foundations and Doctrine

While acknowledging the danger of drawing any hard and fast lessons from history, the following facts apply both to the era immediately prior to the Korean War and potentially to today.

Unit cohesion depends on stability and training. Performance in combat depends on cohesion and competence. These observations appear obvious. Unfortunately, we seem to ignore the implications, as evidenced by three further observations about the modern Army at the tactical level.

- We are, for various reasons, training less. Our battalions do not measure up, by most any standard, to the criteria established by the Army in its doctrine. The evidence of this is regularly splashed across the headlines of *Army Times*: The Army is not performing well at the National Training Center or Joint Readiness Training Center.
- Our personnel policies do not support cohesion at the tactical unit level. In fact, the case is nearly the opposite.
- Our doctrine does not, at any echelon, sufficiently acknowledge the importance of unit cohesion.

If the spectrum of war is defined by self-imposed limitations upon the combatants' means, objectives, geographic area and national support, then we are entering a new age of limited war. The limitations placed upon the new American way of war are even more restrictive. For the United States limited war is further constrained by a uniquely American issue, the requirement for perfection.

If we intend to fulfill our charter as a credible force for the implementation of "policy by other means," we must regain lost ground. US military history further suggests that we cannot rely on additional funds or forces.²¹ We must therefore focus

upon that which we can change. American military power suffers continual trade-offs during fiscal tightening. We cannot afford everything, and our options for dividing funds are simple. We may spend money on training and manpower, equipment modernization, current missions or quality of life issues. Almost every item in the Army budget fits, albeit roughly, into one of these elements. As in the interwar period of 1918-1941, we cannot fund everything. There are, however, ways in which we may use ideas and words to increase our combat effectiveness without significant expenditures. There is room for improvement in our doctrine and the policies through which we "manage" our forces.

The actual tactical composition of the future Army, be it the "medium brigade" or something else, is almost irrelevant to the issue. Regardless of the name, we are leaning toward smaller units as our basic tactical building block. This trend suggests a possible solution with deep roots in Army history. We may use human nature to help build cohesion by bringing back the regiments.

Consider the British: "There was only one religion in the regular army, the regiment; it seemed to draw out of them the best that was in them." Although addressing another army in another period, the factors apply to human beings generally. Divisions are, for the most part, too large to invoke emotional affiliation except when viewed in the past tense. Regiments, true regiments such as the US Army lost with the restructuring into the Pentomic Army of General Maxwell Taylor, may form the basis for cohesion at the tactical level in the future as they have in the past.²³

We are facing a period of decreased personal commitment to the military and a concurrent loss of professionalism characterized by a devotion to self over a devotion to the institution. While many of the reasons for this are tied to the recent downsizing of the military and the resultant uncertainty that the survivors feel towards the Army as a body, the effects may well prove disastrous unless checked. Reorganization along traditional regimental lines may be part of the solution. It will only work, however, with a personnel policy that fosters unit cohesion and true regimental affiliation.

Without mincing words, we must overhaul the entire personnel system for tactical assignments of enlisted soldiers and company grade officers. We must create a new process that acknowledges regimental affiliation in more than name. This has been tried, in half-measures, before. This time we need to go beyond the well-intentioned experiments of the

COHORT and regimental affiliation systems and redesign our personnel assignment and development programs with one goal in mind: developing cohesion at the tactical level.

Finally, we cannot avoid the fact that training at the tactical level has taken a severe hit in the past several years. While acknowledging that we cannot afford to do everything we would like, given the limited resources provided to us by Congress, we must place this at the top of our priority list and hope for the best in the other areas. This will be difficult. It requires a firm decision at the highest levels and a subsequent ironclad commitment to that decision. The pressures will come from within and outside the Army. Congressmen cannot readily point toward an increase in training readiness for their constituents when the time comes for reelection; it is subjective and not material. It is, therefore, a hard sell when the budget is reviewed. This is especially true in light of the cuts necessary in other areas to pay the bill for training. Yet it is the price leaders must pay to honor our martial ancestors and protect those who follow us. It is the least we can do. MR

NOTES

1. Roy K. Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division: Delay and Withdrawal, 5-19 July 1950," in *America's First Battles*, Charles E. Heller and William A Stofft, ed. (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 269. Also see Edward Daily, *Skirmish*. *Red*, *White and Blue*, *The History of the Tith U.S. Cavalry in Korea 1945-1953* (Peducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1992). Flint discusses the general manning and material condition of the Far East Command circa 1950; Daily describes the specifics of the training and manning levels of the 7th Cavalry at that time. Daily enlisted in the US Army in 1949 and was assigned to the 7th Cavalry in Japan later that year. His postwar history of the 7th Cavalry is, in part, biographical.

2. William O. Odom, *After the Trenches, The Transformation of U.S. Army Doctrine 1918-1939* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999). Odom writes about the problems faced by the US *Army following World War I*, many of which were repeated after World War II.

3. Several histories of the US *Army of Occupation stationed in Japan point towards the generally low level of training that many units had. This does not mean there was no training, only that what training occurred was considered inadequate even at the time. Despite the fact that in the months immediately preceding the North Korean invasion and US intervention there had been a push to increase training, resources in time, material and training land constrained the divisions stationed in Japan from conducting anything much beyond rudimentary platoon and company level training.*

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4. Donald Vandergriff, "The Culture Wars," from Digital War. A View from the Front Lines, ed. Robert L. Bateman (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1999), 229.

5. Roger A. Beaumont and William P. Snyder "Combat Effectiveness: Paradigms and Paradoxes" in Combat Effectiveness, Cohesion, Stress and the Volunteer Military, Sam C. Sarkesian, ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1980), 20-56 and Sam C. Sarkesian, "Introduction" in the same volume. Sarkesian defines cohesion as "the attitudes and commitment of individual soldiers to the interrity. unter Military, Sam C. Sarkesian, ed. (London: Sage Publications, 198b), 2U-bo and Sam C. Sarkesian, "Introduction" in the same volume. Sarkesian defines cohesion as "the attitudes and commitment of individual soldiers to the integrity of the unit, the 'will' to fight and the degree to which these are in accord with societal values and expectations." While this is a useful definition, some disagreement exists among military sociologists as to the nature of cohesion. Basically this is a chicken-or-egg question. Does cohesion cause higher military effectiveness, or is it the result or byproduct of military effectiveness which may or may not serve to raise that effectiveness even higher? In any case, cohesion is theoretically a sought after commodity.

6. Allan R. Millett, "American Military History: Clio and Mars as 'Pards'," in David A. Charters, Marc Milner, and J. Brent Wilson, ed., Military History and the Military Profession (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992). Millett has written extensively on the state-of-the-art (of military history) since the 1970s. Also see "American Military History: Over the Top," in Herbert J. Bass, ed., The State of American History (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), 157-182, and his 1975 late of American History (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), 157-182, and his 1975 late of American History (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), 157-182, and his 1975 late of 1919, 1950," 270.

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8. Daily, *Skirmish: Red, White and Blue, The History of the 7th U.S. Cavalry in Korea* 1945-1953, 28 and interviews by author with Daily, various dates, 1994-1997. Daily participated in these operations as a private in Hotel Company, 2/7 Cavalry. He was later promoted via battlefield commission to 2LT, and subsequently captured during a North Korean attack along the Naktong perimeter. He escaped some 30 days later near the 38th parallel and evaded capture until he could rejoin US forces. He fought through the summer of 1951 in 2/7 Cavalry until replaced as part of the new individual rotation policy.

9. Ibid., 29.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. S.L.A. Marshall, Men Against Fire (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1947). Marshall's observations were taken at face value for a long time. Only in the past 10-15 years have his statistics and claims been held up for rigorous examination. Several were found wanting. See Roger Spiller, "S.L.A. Marshall and the Ratio of Fire," The RUSI Journal, 133/4 (Winter 1988), 63-69. Spiller noted in the 1989 article that the number of companies Marshall claimed to have interviewed varied widely. In addresses made at Fort Leavenworth in the early 1950s Marshall claimed 603 companies interviewed, while by 1957 the number had dropped back down to "something over 500." In short, Marshall's claims may have been baldly exaggerated. Moreover, it appears that Marshall produced his famous "25 percent fire their weapons" statistic out of whole cloth, since he apparently never actually asked that question in any of the many interviews that he did conduct. Also see Fredric Smoler, "The Secret of the Soldiers Who Didn't Shoot," American Heritage, 40/2 (March 1989), 37-43.

13. Robert L. Bateman, "Shock and the Digital Battlefield." Armor 107 (January-February 1998), 14-19.

14. Bruce Allen Watson, When Soldiers Quit, Studies in Military Disintegration (Westport, CN: Prager, 1997), 156-163.

15. Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division: Delay and Withdrawal, 5-19 July 1950." 281-282. Flint describes how light (relatively) the casualties of TF Smith had been up until the order to withdraw. After reconsolidation following the withdrawal into Taejon, the TF reported 148 enlisted and 5 commissioned officers missing. This was, in fact, far better than the estimated 250 that were missing in the immediate period following the disintegration of TF Smith.

16. Robert A. Doughty, The Evolution of US Army Tactical Doctrine, 1946-76. (Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1979). Doughty traces the evolution throughout the period covered by this essay. Nowhere is it noted that the Army has ever incorporated the lessons derived from

based causes for what happened in the tail grass over the course of 24 hours in late November 1965.

19. CSM (Ret.) James Scott, interview with author, 23 November 1996, la Drang Reunion, Washington DC. CSM Scott was the battalion CSM for 2/7 Cavalry through this period and into the fight at LZ Albany. His account of the battle, but more importantly the months before the battle, are detailed and explicit. In describing how the battalion learned that it would be sent into combat CSM Scott relates that the first he personally heard of the deployment was from television, when President Johnson announced that he was sending the "Air Cavalry."

20. Moore and Galloway, We Were Soldiers Once and Young, 207-210. The new battalion commander of 2/7 Cavalry was LTC Robert McDade, a Korean War veteran who had spent most of his career after that war in the personnel field.

21. Robert L. Bateman, "Without Malice, Without Sympathy, American Antipathy to the Military, 1607-Present," ARMY (January 1999), 36-47. Like Odom in After the Trenches, but over a longer timeframe, Bateman examines the near perpetual phenomena of American unreadiness that occurs as a result of the American attitude towards military forces over the course of history.

22. Lord Moran, The Anatomy of Courage, 2nd ed. 1966 (Garden City Park, New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1987), 184.

23. Robert Bateman, "The Uses of History" ARMY (Summer 1999).

24. David McCormick, The Downsized Warrior, America's Army in Transition (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 157-194.

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